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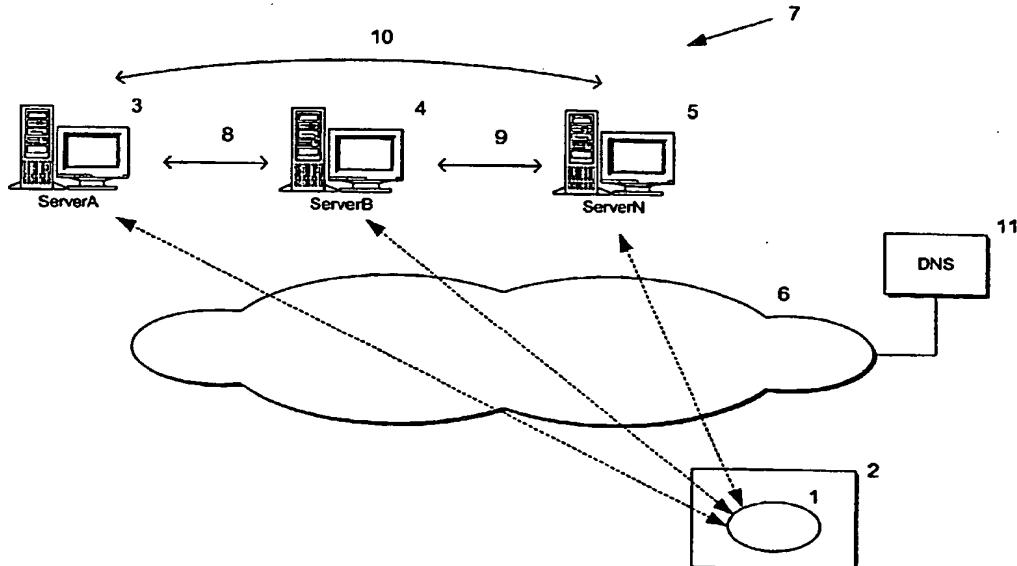
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(57) **Abstract:** A method of load balancing for establishing persistent connections over the Internet, in which a client connects to a server and receives a list of servers capable of providing a service, together with status information indicating which of the servers are available, the number of users currently being served by each server and a priority grouping to which each server belongs. Based on the list, the client makes a decision as to the server that is to provide the service.